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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TOKYO 000105

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SUBJECT: ROK ENVOY VISIT POINTS TO IMPROVING JAPAN-ROK
RELATIONS

Classified By: Charge d' Affaires, a.i. Joseph R. Donovan. Reasons 1.4
(B) (D)

¶1. (C) Summary. ROK President-elect Lee's special envoy Lee Sang-deuk's January 15-18 visit to Tokyo should contribute to creation of "better bilateral relations" between the two countries, contacts tell Embassy Tokyo. Lee's message will likely contain "meaningful differences" from that of outgoing President Roh. However, in dealing with historical differences between Japan and South Korea, Lee may take a different approach, but will not change the substance of current policy. Foreign ministry officials state that Prime Minister Fukuda is "thinking seriously" about attending Lee Myung-bak's inauguration on February 25, but that much will depend on the Diet schedule. A leading academic notes that improved Japan-ROK relations augurs well for resumption of United States-Japan-ROK dialogue and closer cooperation in the Six-Party Talks process. End Summary.

Special Envoys

¶2. (C) ROK Embassy contacts view recent post-ROK election bilateral contacts as "good signs" for the bilateral relationship. South Korean special envoy Lee Sang-deuk will visit January 15-18 and former Japan PM Yoshiro Mori) PM Fukuda's own special envoy) met January 10 with Lee Myung-bak and delivered a letter from the PM seeking to strengthen bilateral ties and urging greater United States-Japan-ROK cooperation. ROK Embassy First Secretary Kang Yang-hoon described this series of events as "very active movement in Japan-ROK relations," and told Embassy political officer January 11 that special envoy Lee's visit should contribute to creation of "better bilateral relations" between the two countries.

¶3. (C) According to Kang, Lee is one of four special envoys appointed by ROK president-elect Lee Myung-bak to be sent to the United States, Japan, Russia, and the PRC. Lee Sang-deuk, who is President-elect Lee's older brother, will meet with PM Yasuo Fukuda, FM Masahiko Koumura, leading LDP, Komeito and DPJ officials, including Ichiro Ozawa, and others. According to Kang, Lee will preview president-elect Lee Myung-bak's agenda for the Japan-ROK relationship. Kang,

who said that he had not yet been fully briefed on the content of the envoy's message, nevertheless assessed that Lee Sang-deuk's brief would contain "meaningful differences" from that of outgoing President Roh. Regarding historical differences between Japan and Korea, Kang observed that President-elect Lee's handling of these issues might use a different approach than President Roh, but the substance would be unchanged.

Strategic Dialogue

¶4. (C) Lee Sang-deuk's meetings will take place almost one week after the fifth Japan-ROK Vice-Ministerial Strategic Dialogue, held January 8 between Japan VFM Shotaro Yachi and ROK VM Cho Jung-pyo in Seoul. As MOFA Northeast Asia Director Shigeo Yamada previewed for Embassy Tokyo, the focus for this round of the dialogue was the DPRK and Japan-ROK relations over the next several months. (Note: MOFA promised to provide a readout from the talks after the delegation's return next week.) According to Kang, the vice ministers discussed the Six-Party Talks, among the other agenda items.

Fukuda to Attend Inauguration?

¶5. (C) MOFA Senior Foreign Policy Coordinator Takehiro Funakoshi told Embassy Tokyo that Prime Minister Fukuda is "thinking seriously" about attending Lee Myung-bak's

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inauguration on February 25, but that much will depend on the Diet schedule at the time. As for January 11 press reports that the Japanese Government is considering inviting Lee to visit Japan in May, Funakoshi noted that several options for exchanging visits are being examined.

Trilateral, Six-Party

¶6. (C) Keio University Professor Masao Okonogi, who was recently appointed to PM Fukuda's Study Panel on Foreign Policy, told Embassy Tokyo that former PM Mori's meeting with president-elect Lee represented a first step toward improvement in Japan-ROK relations. Fukuda would likely attend Lee's inauguration ceremony, at which time the two will agree to resume shuttle diplomacy, Okonogi observed. Trilateral United States-Japan-ROK coordination would also move forward, leading to closer cooperation in the Six-Party Talks process, he predicted.

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